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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000235

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: UPBEAT MINORITY LEADERS ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN
ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 3538

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Timothy Lenderking for reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) While Christian and other minority leaders still smart over the single-seat minority quotas in the Provincial Elections Law (PEL), they no longer talk of a boycott and are encouraging their constituents in the north and other regions to vote in the provincial elections on January 31. Christian leaders expressed satisfaction about the IA security reinforcements sent to Mosul after the October attacks on Christians, which remain largely in place. They blame the Kurds for the October violence -- allegations which the Embassy and MNF-I believe are politicized and incorrect. They accuse the Kurds of harassing and intimidating independent minority leaders, harboring expansionist aims, and minority vote-buying. By all accounts, most of the Christian IDPs from the October attacks have returned to their Mosul homes. Christian leaders all emphasized the need to stop Christian emigration and criticized efforts to facilitate it. Minorities are concerned about election security, just like all Iraqis. End summary.

Not All Doom and Gloom for Christians

¶2. (C) Assyrian Democratic Movement leader and Council of Representatives (CoR) member Yonadam Kanna recently assured Poloff that the security situation in the north is quite stable and that 70-90 percent of the Christians who fled Mosul during the October attacks have returned. Some have decided to continue living with relatives in villages around Mosul, so they can rent out their Mosul homes. (Note: This is consistent with PRT reporting. End note.) Kanna claimed the KDP may try to assassinate Christian candidates. He, like most Christians, blames the Kurds for the October attacks on Christians in Mosul, and alleged they are now trying to co-opt Christian provincial council candidates. (Comment: Kanna did not provide evidence to support his assertion. He and other anti-KRG Christian politicians continue to repeat these charges, which the Embassy, PRT Ninewa, and MNF-I regard as unfounded and politically motivated. End comment.) Kanna emphasized the normalcy of life for Iraqi Christians and praised GOI security reinforcements in and around Mosul. He further pleaded, "Stop accepting Christian refugees in the U.S.; we want to keep Christians here!" (Note: Kanna participated in a November 17 VTC with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which subsequently recommended that Iraq be designated a "Country of Particular Concern." Referring to his exchanges with USCIRF Commissioners during the VTC, Kanna said he found them "aggressive" and "extreme." He added: "Iraq is not Darfur." End note.)

A Better Future for Christians Who Stay

¶3. (C) Kanna's CoR colleague, Chaldean Union Democratic Party leader Ablahad Afram Sawa, told Poloff on January 18 that he is no longer part of the Kurdish Alliance (KAL) due to what he believes is KAL two-timing over the minority quota issue in the Provincial Election Law (PEL). Sawa described the situation in Ninewa as peaceful, noting that Christians had celebrated Christmas joyously and openly. While Sawa supported, with Kanna, an election boycott immediately after November 3 passage of the PEL, he now travels frequently to the north to encourage Christians to vote and conceded there was nothing to gain from a boycott. Sawa said that in addition to fielding independent candidates, Christians are running on other lists, including the Hadba and Kurdish lists. While Sawa is satisfied with security preparations for the election and that voting will be orderly and fair, he expects widespread fraud during vote counting.

¶4. (C) Sawa also confirmed that most Christian IDPs had returned to Mosul. He too blames the Kurds for the October violence, but, like Kanna, offered no evidence in support of his contention. He differentiated between two kinds of "bad" Kurds -- extremists in Mosul, who want to drive out Christians, and those in Kurdistan. On the other hand, he acknowledged that it was not in the Kurds' interest to force any minority out of the region, because that would only increase Arab influence. Regarding the future of Iraqi Christians, Sawa cited four demands: Stop emigration ("Those

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who encourage emigration are wrong!"); improve general security; effectively implement laws (Sawa noted that Iraqi law does not prohibit sale of alcohol, but rogue militias harass and kill Christians who do.); and provide economic opportunities.

Shabak Identity Split

¶5. (C) CoR member and Shabak activist Hunain al-Qaddo recently told Poloff that the KAL was promoting a Shabak candidate, Salam Juma' Khudr, who claimed he was Kurdish. Al-Qaddo also accused the KAL of distributing cash to small minority parties in order to buy their loyalty and alleged the Kurds were blatantly trying to "Kurdify" the Shabak. Al-Qaddo was confident, however, that Shabak, especially in the villages of Bartalla and Bashiga, will support his candidate, Qusay Abbas. Al-Qaddo, too, believes the Kurds were "directly or indirectly" involved in the October attacks, because they hoped the murders would make Christians distrust Arabs and ask to be joined to the KRG. He estimated 70-80 percent of Christian IDPs had returned to Mosul because of improved security. With regard to election security, Al-Qaddo pleaded for MNF-I assistance to Iraqi security forces (ISF). (Note: MND-N is indeed coordinating election security with the ISF, and offering assistance where needed. End note.)

Mandaeans Prepare for First Election

¶6. (C) The Sabaeen-Mandaean community is not unhappy over its allocation of one seat on the Baghdad Provincial Council, although they had hoped for seats in Maysan and Nasiriyah as well. Mandaean Council President Nidam Fizaa and his brother, Non-Muslim Endowments Mandaean Director Zahroon Tomah, told Poloff that the sole Mandaean candidate, Ali Hussein Zahroon, a cousin of Tomah's, had a Russian engineering degree and had been a deputy director general in

the Ministry of Industry during Saddam Hussein's regime. Thomah noted that Mandaean had printed 5000 election posters, which were being distributed privately, and added that the Mandaean candidate also had Muslim and Christian supporters. Both Fizaa and Tomah predicted low election turnout, citing voter indifference and disgust with religious parties' lack of political programs.

Comment

17. (C) The attitude of minority leaders toward the provincial elections has evolved positively over the months, to the point these leaders are now advocates of minority participation in the January polls. As a result, we anticipate good participation by Iraq's minorities in the elections. Although the low number of seats afforded to minorities by the PEL may still rankle, minority leaders have wisely concluded, as urged by the Ambassador and emboffs in numerous meetings over the months (reftel), that the interests of their communities are best served by participation in the electoral process rather than abstinence.

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